

The administration's policy of endless occupation will cost us trillions of dollars and countless casualties. It will lead to the deaths of countless Iraqi civilians and surely force millions more to become refugees. Meanwhile, al Qaeda will continue to hatch its plots against the United States in their safe havens far from Iraq.

It is clear that Iraq will never stabilize and find peace while we are present. Our occupation of Iraq prevents Iraqis from finding solutions to their own problems, and it prevents the regional and international diplomacy that is absolutely needed to help them reconcile and to rebuild.

The timely withdrawal of American troops is the essential first step in solving the Iraqi problem. So long as our troops and military contractors are there, the situation can only and will only get worse.

In the days ahead, I and others will urge Congress to move to end the occupation. Congress has the power of the purse. We must pass a bill requiring that all spending related to Iraq be used for only one purpose, and that is to fully fund the safe, orderly, and responsible withdrawal of all American troops and military contractors.

If we fail to do this, we will have failed the American people, who sent us to Congress last November with a clear message: End the occupation of Iraq. And we will have failed our country morally, we will have failed our country politically, and certainly we will have failed it economically.

It is time, Mr. Speaker, to do what we know is right and what is best for our country: bring our troops home.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. ETHERIDGE) is recognized for 5 minutes. (Mr. ETHERIDGE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

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The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

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MAJORITY MAKERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. SUTTON) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Ms. SUTTON. Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin this hour by talking about a subject that has become one of the most significant issues of our time. I am going to be joined by members of the freshman class or the Majority Makers throughout this hour to talk about Iraq.

We have heard in recent days about what the President's idea of our way forward is. He has called for more money and more patience and a renewed commitment to U.S. troops in Iraq for the foreseeable future, another stay-the-course strategy that puts us on a path toward a \$1 trillion, at least 10-year presence war in Iraq. On top of that, we have no convincing evidence that the political reconciliation necessary will be achieved even after so much sacrifice on the part of our brave troops will be realized.

I believe that the President's plan for Iraq amounts to an open-ended and dangerous commitment of American troops in Iraq and an open wallet from the American people to pay for it.

The question should not be whether we keep our troops in Iraq for 10 years. The question should be: How do we responsibly redeploy our troops? And how do we develop that plan that will do so while we continue to protect our homeland and fight against terrorists?

On August 19, we saw in the New York Times an editorial that was written by seven brave U.S. soldiers. I bring this to the attention, Mr. Speaker, of you and all those who may be tuned in because I think it is important that we listen to their vantage point. And while I won't be reading the entire article, I will read excerpts from it. Again, it is August 19, the New York Times, and I would suggest that everybody who can take a look at the complete editorial. It is entitled, "The War As We Saw It." And it begins:

"Viewed from Iraq at the tail end of a 15-month deployment, the political debate in Washington is indeed surreal. Counterinsurgency is, by definition, a competition between insurgents and counterinsurgents for the control and support of a population.

□ 1630

To believe that Americans, with an occupying force that long ago outlived its reluctant welcome, can win over a recalcitrant local population and win this counterinsurgency is farfetched. As responsible infantrymen and non-commissioned officers with the 82nd Airborne Division soon heading back home, we are skeptical of recent press coverage portraying the conflict as increasingly manageable and feel it has neglected the mounting civil, political and social unrest we see every day."

And then they say, in parentheses, "Obviously these are our personal views and should not be seen as official within our chain of command."

They continue:

"The claim that we are increasingly in control of the battlefields in Iraq is an assessment arrived at through a

flawed, American-centered framework. Yes, we are militarily superior, but our successes are offset by some failures elsewhere. What soldiers call the 'battle space' remains the same, with changes only at the margins. It is crowded with actors who do not fit neatly into boxes: Sunni extremists, al Qaeda terrorists, Shiite militiamen, criminals and armed tribes. This situation is made more complex by the questionable loyalties and Janus-faced role of the Iraqi police and Iraqi army, which have been trained and armed at United States taxpayers' expense."

And then they continue:

"Reports that a majority of Iraqi army commanders are now reliable partners can be considered only misleading rhetoric. The truth is that battalion commanders, even if well meaning, have little or no influence over the thousands of obstinate men under them in an incoherent chain of command who are really loyal only to their militias."

They continue in this article, and they state, "Political reconciliation in Iraq will occur, but not at our insistence or in ways that meet our benchmarks. It will happen on Iraqi terms when the reality on the battlefield is congruent with that in the political sphere. There will be no magnanimous solutions that please every party the way we expect, and there will be winners and losers. The choice that we have left is to decide which side we will take. Trying to please every party to this conflict, as we do now, will only ensure we are hated by all in the long run."

These brave soldiers conclude this op-ed with the following:

"It would be prudent for us to increasingly let Iraqis take center stage in all matters, to come up with a nuanced policy in which we assist them from the margins but let them resolve their differences as they see fit. This suggestion is not meant to be defeatist, but rather to highlight our pursuit of incompatible policies to absurd ends without recognizing the incongruities."

They say, "We need not talk about our morale. As committed soldiers, we will see this mission through."

I share that because I think it's worth having out there for our consideration and our contemplation to add to the wealth of information that is being presented to the American people.

I'm sad to report that since this op-ed began, they started writing this, during the course of writing it, one of these brave soldiers was shot in the head, and he is recovering. But on September 13, the headline in the same New York Times sadly stated, "Skeptical But Loyal Soldiers Die in a Truck Crash in Iraq." And two of these soldiers who had the courage not only to go and fight for our Nation but to do everything they were asked to do were killed in Iraq.

We are here today to talk about this pressing, pressing issue. The light that

has been shed on this by these soldiers should be part of the discussion. I am joined here on the floor right now by a couple of my colleagues, leaders on this issue, I know, who feel it deeply. The gentleman from Florida, RON KLEIN, a tremendous new Member, at this point I am going to just yield to him for his remarks.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. Thank you, Congresswoman SUTTON.

It's a pleasure to serve with you and the other 54 Members of our class. They call us freshmen. Some people call us freshmen. Some people call us majority makers. But clearly we're new Members, and I think that as new Members we probably have heard through some very active campaigns a very clear message from our communities and, that is, what's going on in Iraq, this is back in November, but continues to today, as your point is, is not working. And it's not working on a number of levels.

The way I sort of focus on this is the notion that all this should be about the national security of the American people. This is about what makes us safe in our homes, our communities, our States, our country. And yes, we obviously have interests around the world in other places as well. But first and foremost, what's important to us is at home, that we know our families and that we are protected.

The problem as I see it, and I think it has now been confirmed, and I'm on the Foreign Affairs Committee, so I've had the opportunity, as many of the Members of Congress have had, to get the briefings of a number of people, including members of the State Department and others, and we've all had the chance to go over and speak to the Joint Chiefs of Staff over at the Pentagon to get a firsthand question-and-answer about what the assumptions were in the surge and what the assumptions were in adding or subtracting military personnel and how our commitments were affecting the rest of our military and the rest of the commitments that we as Americans have internally. National Guard. I come from Florida. We have hurricane season, and are we at risk in terms of being able to respond, or anywhere in the world where our military is needed.

I think it's very clear, and I think most Americans understand this, that al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, the people that perpetrated 9/11, it wasn't Iraq, it was Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda. Al Qaeda was not in Iraq at the time of September 11.

The bottom line is Osama bin Laden is still operating. Al Qaeda is still operating. And it's not operating in Baghdad. Sure there are cells in places in Iraq, and it's up to our military, and our military understands its responsibilities to root them out. Those are specific engagements and we should find those cells and root them out.

But al Qaeda is not limited to Iraq. They're operating in different parts of the world. Afghanistan is at a tipping

point, as we understand it. Nobody, no Democrat or Republican, seems to be contesting that issue. Americans understand that the Taliban and al Qaeda are re-emerging in Afghanistan. Yet, our assets, our men, our women, our military hardware and equipment are saddled and stuck in Iraq. That's not to say that there's not a terrible situation in Iraq. It is a terrible situation.

But as Americans, we have to put ourselves first and say, what's in the best interest for America? Both here at home, and dealing with Afghanistan, dealing if there's a problem in Pakistan, dealing with Iran, dealing with North Korea. These are the potential hot spots around the world, where there are potential nuclear issues and things like that.

My biggest concern all along, and I know I share this with certainly all Members of our Democratic side, and I know many Republicans. This is not a Democrat-Republican issue. This is an American issue. It's what is the right thing to do. I think it's very clear, based on everything we've seen so far, is that this is not going to get resolved now, 6 months from now, a year from now, 5, 10 years from now, with just a military solution.

Senator LINDSAY GRAHAM, a Republican from the Carolinas, was before our Foreign Affairs Committee today, and he said he was there. He also specifically said, listen, our generals are generals. He comes from a military background. He did work in the legal corps of our military. He said, but, you know, generals are not always necessarily right. Ask them the tough questions. I know when General Petraeus came before our committee and many of us listened very carefully as to what he had to say, many of us were not quite fully satisfied that the answers were consistent. On the one hand he said, yeah, we're going to draw down. On the other hand he's saying, we need power, we need troops, we need, you know, the power to make sure that everything is there. It didn't all sound consistent to me.

But the bottom line is I think we need to be strategic and smart. And re-deployment is not a question of getting everybody out immediately. Nobody is suggesting that among our group here today. What we are saying is be smart. Secure the borders. Do some things to make sure this doesn't spill out. Really double and triple our efforts to retrain the military, and there are other ideas not limited to anybody in this room. There are lots of generals out there, retired and active, that are coming up with good suggestions.

But repackaging the stay-the-course approach, which is what is going on right now, is not the answer. We need to have a better answer to protect our men and women in the field, and protect America most significantly, at home and abroad.

Ms. SUTTON. Thank you, Congressman KLEIN.

I couldn't agree more that we need to have that kind of a plan. And unfortu-

nately, a plan for responsibly redeploying and a plan for dealing with the broad scope of protecting America and what's in America's best interest is not being offered up. In fact, it's not even being discussed, because we're having the same discussion that we've been having for years now about staying the course in Iraq.

I would like to shift it over to my colleague from New Hampshire, Representative CAROL SHEA-PORTER, who I know can shed a great deal of light on this as well as a member of the Armed Services Committee.

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. Thank you, Congresswoman.

I am on the Armed Services Committee and we've had many, many hearings on this issue. It has become very clear to me that we need a plan to redeploy responsibly and to start it immediately.

First, let's go over some of the facts once again because it is a national security issue here. There were no Iraqis on the plane that day. 9/11, there were no Iraqis. But we were attacked by people who had been trained in Afghanistan in Osama bin Laden's group, and we needed to go there. We needed to go to Afghanistan. We still need to win in Afghanistan. But somehow or another we got diverted to Iraq, and we have paid the price, and the Iraqis have paid the price as well.

We are now spending \$10 billion a month, that we acknowledge, in Iraq. We really don't know the cost. We borrow money from Communist China to pay for this.

I was a military spouse and so I'm feeling particularly protective of our troops. Our soldiers are exhausted. We send the same team in over and over again. This is an American problem, not a Republican problem or a Democratic problem. It's an American problem, and it calls for an American solution.

Let us talk about what it looks like in Iraq right now. And I have been there. What it looks like right now, and it was the independent Jones report that verified this, and I appreciated the report very much, retired General Jones and his commission. What they talked about was 2.2 million Iraqis displaced within the borders of Iraq. Every single month for the past 6 months, 100,000 Iraqis have moved. They've left their homes, their communities, their jobs, if they had jobs, and they have moved.

Now, why would 100,000 people move? Because it's not safe. It's as simple as that. We've had ethnic cleansing there. If you look at the maps that was in the Jones Commission, 2005, you could see in the neighborhoods in Baghdad that they were mixed, Sunni and Shia living side by side. By 2007, the mixed neighborhoods are virtually gone. They've had ethnic cleansing. They have militias.

People say, well, you know, take a look at this. The Sunnis have joined with the United States to defeat al

Qaeda. No, not really. What it is is an enemy of my enemy is a friend. What has happened here is that the Sunnis have joined with the U.S. right now so they can rid themselves of their enemies.

We estimate that al Qaeda is maybe 7 to 10 percent of the violence there. But the reality is that most of this violence is still a civil war. It comes from within and it has not gotten better.

We know that 95 percent of the children are showing terrible signs of post-traumatic stress syndrome disorder. We know that they have dirty water. We know that they have 2 hours of electricity if they're lucky.

We know that in every way to measure standard of life, it has declined. Why are we still there? That's the question that all of us are asking. Why are we still in Iraq? And why does the President have a plan that says, stay. Stay for how long? Just stay. That is not acceptable to the American public anymore.

I yield back to you and I thank you very much for bringing this to the floor today so that we can tell the American people what has really happened, what we have heard from independent commissions, and what the reality is for the people of Iraq and the people of the United States.

I would like to add one more point which is important. Let's look at the American benchmarks and let's ask where America is now. Where are we on education? Where are we on health care? Where are we on jobs? Where are we on infrastructure? We have poured so much money into Iraq. What about American benchmarks?

Ms. SUTTON. I thank the gentlewoman for her excellent remarks. I guess the question that comes to mind when you ask where are we on these domestic items, where are we going to be in 10 years on these domestic items?

At this point I would just like to shift it over to my great colleague, a new freshman Member, a majority maker who has brought a lot of valuable insight and knowledge to this body and on this subject, the Honorable JOE COURTNEY.

□ 1645

Mr. COURTNEY. Thank you, Congressman SUTTON, for yielding.

And I just want to follow up with my friend from the Armed Services Committee about the lack of strategic balance that presently is occurring right now in Iraq and Afghanistan. In late August, German authorities arrested three terrorists who were plotting a major attack on an American military installation in Germany. Where were they trained? Well, we know the answer. They were trained in northern Pakistan, in that region of the world where our own military and intelligence officials have identified the real threat to Europe and the U.S. in terms of where future hits are going to take place.

As a member of the Armed Services Committee, I was in Afghanistan in

May. We had briefings from military commanders over there who have said that training camps are in full level of activity, and they made a flat prediction that we are going to see attempted attacks emanating from that region of the world.

Let's step back. We have 26,000 troops in Afghanistan; 165,000 troops in Iraq. Is this a strategy that is really aimed at what is in the national interest of this country? I mean obviously if we look at just recent events in terms of where arrests are taking place, where the real training is taking place to hit Europe and the U.S., the fact of the matter is it is in the northern part of Pakistan, which is an area that the Taliban is now pretty much able to move and operate unimpeded because we have a dysfunctional relationship with the Pakistani Government and the Afghan Government is too weak to basically police those borders.

And I think a lot of the debate that is taking place right now after the Petraeus-Crocker report, which is appropriately focused on whether or not the benchmarks that the Iraq Government set forth have been met and what is the level of wear and tear in terms of our Armed Forces, they are clearly important to discuss, but we also need to have an overall strategic vision about what is in the national interest of this country. And the fact is being involved at the level that we are at right now in a civil war in Iraq is not in America's national interest, and for the sake of our military families, as Congresswoman SHEA-PORTER indicated, and certainly for a safer, smarter foreign policy, we need to have a change in course and a redeployment.

Over the summer the New York Times did a study on the situation right now in terms of the mid-level officer corps of our Armed Services, our ground forces. In the 2001 graduating class from West Point, which just completed their 5-year tour of duty, 44 percent of the class have left the Armed Forces. That is the highest number in three decades. People need to think about that in terms of what is happening to the best and the brightest in our military. They are voting with their feet. They are leaving the armed services. And many commanders from the Vietnam era, General Shinseki being one of them, the Army chief of staff who had the wisdom and vision to predict that we would need hundreds of thousands of troops if we were going to truly police Iraq after Afghanistan, have spoken all across the country about the fact that what's happening in Iraq today is having the same effect, same negative effect, on our Armed Forces that the war in Vietnam had, which is a hollowed-out mid-level officer corps of our armed services. It took a generation to recover from that, and we are now seeing, with the exodus that is happening right now with, again, the best and brightest of our West Point graduates leaving our armed services, that we, for the sake of

our own future, ground forces and military readiness, need to have a change of course in Iraq.

And Senator WEBB has an amendment that's coming up, the Dwell Time Amendment, which will require the Armed Forces by law to make sure that our Armed Forces have the same amount of dwell time as they do deployment. I think that is an important step. I am very excited that it looks like we are going to get to the 60-vote number in the Senate and overcome a cloture, that we are going to start bringing some sanity back into our military and defense policy so that we don't destroy the greatest warfighting machine in the world.

And I know Congressman WELCH from Vermont, my neighbor to the north and a good Red Sox fan, is also someone who has talked a lot about this issue in terms of the impact on our military families, and I would be happy to hear from Congressman WELCH from Vermont.

Mr. WELCH of Vermont. Thank you, Mr. COURTNEY.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think any of us want to be here talking about the war because it's a tragedy, and I believe the American people have come to that conclusion. Whether they supported going into the war or they opposed going into the war, they figured out that at this point our military men and women have done all they can do. They toppled Saddam. They reported back truthfully that there were no weapons of mass destruction, and they allowed stability in Iraq so that Iraq had three democratic elections. At a certain point, it is up to the Iraqis to step up and build their own institutions and their own democracy. We obviously can help and we have some responsibility. But the American people, those who supported the war, those who opposed going into the war initially, have come to a pretty commonsense conclusion: We have done our job, the military has performed ably, and it is time for the Iraqis to take our place.

The fundamental question that the President has put to this Congress and to the American people is this: Is it the proper role of the United States military to be refereeing a civil war? That's the question. Now, Republicans and Democrats in the past have been united that our military has a primary responsibility for defending us in fighting wars, not for refereeing civil wars.

A couple of things. One, there has never been an example in the history of the world where a third-party military has actually refereed a civil war to a peaceful political and economic conclusion. There are examples of third-party militaries, outside militaries, coming in on one side and, through force of arms, imposing an outcome. But that is not the policy even of the Bush administration.

Is this a civil war? Here's what is going on in Iraq right now: There are several different civil wars that are underway. In the south in the Basra region where our ally Great Britain has

basically taken its 44,000 troops down to 5,000 troops and redeployed them to a base, there are three different Shia wars going on. They're not fighting about democracy. They're not fighting pro- or anti-Iran primarily. They're not fighting about the future of Iraq as a united country. They are fighting about oil. It is about who is going to be in control of that port and that refinery in Basra.

You then go to Kurdistan. Kurdistan has been, in effect, independent since 1991, Mr. Speaker, after the first Gulf War. And they have actually built an economy. They have outside investment coming in. They will not even allow the Iraqi flag to be flown in Kurdistan and are bent on achieving their own independence. But they want oil as well and are threatening, and they have an independent military, the Peshmurga, to take significant forceful action if they don't, from their perspective, get their share of oil in the Kirkuk region.

Then you have Baghdad. Baghdad has been the site of the most extreme ethnic cleansing. Before the fall of Saddam, Baghdad had 65 percent population that was Sunni. That was the seat of Saddam's power. Now it is 75 percent Shia.

A neighborhood that I visited, Mr. COURTNEY, when I was with a delegation to Iraq, the Dora neighborhood, had previously been Sunni and was now Shia, and peace came about basically by displacing the people who used to be there and putting new people in.

And the overall dislocation in Iraq is astonishing, as you mentioned, my friend from New Hampshire: 2 million Iraqis displaced internally, 2 million exiled; 4 million people already, about 60,000 a month, are affected by this. And that is the equivalent in the United States, 20 percent of our population or about 50 million people. Think about it if 50 million people were displaced, either thrown out of the country or fleeing the country or had to move from Texas to Vermont or Vermont to New York because of force and fear.

Then you have the provinces around Baghdad. The Sunni Triangle, Anbar, Diyala, a couple of provinces where General Petraeus was arguing that there was, quote, "progress." Well, again, no one is going to quibble about a military person's estimation of whether there is military progress, but what has happened there largely is that there has been dislocation. The Sunni tribal leaders have done what most analysts expected they would do: They would turn against al Qaeda because they are nationalists. They are much more concerned about Iraq than they are accommodating this radical ideology and they would, quote, "work with the United States."

But what's the price that we are paying? What is the tactical decision that was made? The decision was made to arm tribal chiefs. Now, that can work in the short run. It gives them arms to

fight alongside American soldiers in some particular circumstances. But what is the overall policy of the Bush administration? It is a strong central Iraqi Government centered in Baghdad. So what you have now is a United States policy that arms factions in the provinces, which is a momentary truce of convenience, that has no loyalty to the central government in Baghdad. And down the road, as what happened in Afghanistan when the United States, to pursue its interest against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, armed the Taliban, and that Taliban then became the monster that produced an Osama bin Laden. But we have our policy where we are literally doing two things against the middle: arming factions who are hostile to a central government even as we say our goal is to have a strong central government.

So none of us know what all the details are, but what you have is an incredibly internal complexity: a Shia south where there is Shia factional fighting, a Sunni Triangle where there is a temporary alliance of convenience, you have ethnic cleansing in Baghdad, and you have a Kurdistan that is insisting upon being independent.

Incidentally, on this question of being independent, even the President's friends who have business interests are getting it. You read the report last week about Hunt Oil. Hunt Oil is owned by Mr. Hunt, a very good friend of the President, a big contributor and a member of the Foreign Policy Advisory Committee that the President pays deference to, listens to. Mr. Hunt bypassed the central government in Iraq and is entering into a direct oil agreement with Kurdistan. So he not only has made his bet that the President's policy is going to fail, he is making arrangements to profit by that failure.

So why is it that we are asking the American military, the American taxpayer to continue pursuing a dead-end policy? There is one reason that the President now offers to defend a policy that is bankrupt, that is a dead end, that has a history of failure. That argument that the administration is making is this: If we leave, there will be chaos.

Now, think about it. Those who oppose the war, those who voted against it argue that if we invaded Iraq, in all likelihood the outcome would be the quick toppling of Saddam and the long-term chaos and violence that would follow. The argument that the President rejected then he is embracing now.

All of us who oppose the war really do so with a heavy heart because we know that the choices that are available to this country and to the people of Iraq are very constrained and there is going to be untold suffering that lies ahead. We don't have good choices, but the question is what is the right choice that is going to mitigate the suffering? And that right choice has to be to redeploy our troops because the continued presence of the United States through

the military emphasizes a military approach to a political problem. And that's why all of us are here doing everything we can to change our direction in Iraq.

And I thank you for my opportunity to participate with my wonderful colleagues.

Ms. SUTTON. Thank you, Congressman WELCH.

And we have been joined by another great new Member of the class and a great help on issues related to Iraq and so many more things, my colleague from the Rules Committee, the esteemed MIKE ARCURI.

I yield to Mr. ARCURI.

Mr. ARCURI. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend and colleague from the great State of Ohio for organizing this and bringing us all together here, and I thank all of you for being here.

Like so many other Members of Congress, I have had an opportunity to go to Iraq. And recently I came back from there, about 3 weeks ago, and I couldn't help but be so impressed with the incredible job that our troops are doing there. The men and women that are there are doing everything that is asked of them and much more in an incredibly hostile environment.

□ 1700

And they're doing it not just as a job, but they're doing it with intensity and passion. And they're doing a great job at what they do in just incredibly hostile circumstances. I am convinced, after seeing the job that they did, that our military, in a just cause, could accomplish anything we ask of them, anything in the world. And I was just very impressed with how hard they're working.

But you can't help but be troubled by the fact that the mission there continues to change. I can't help but think about, the old example that they use in football is every time that the team sets up to kick a field goal they move the goalpost back. It just seems like that's what we're doing. First, as my friend from Vermont just said, we were told we were going to Iraq for weapons of mass destruction. That didn't pan out. We were told we had to remove a dictator in Saddam Hussein. Our soldiers did that, and they did it magnificently. Then we were told we had to stay until there were free elections. We had free elections. Then we were told that we had to stay there; in fact, we not only had to stay there, we had to increase our numbers there, we had to have a surge so that we could reduce the violence so that the government would have an opportunity, would have a chance to come together. And that's exactly what our soldiers did. And despite that fact, we are still told that we will continue to be there. This is just unimaginable.

Our soldiers have done everything that we have asked of them, and much more, in an incredibly hostile environment, and yet they continue to be told that they have to stay in Iraq. And for what?

I am convinced, after meeting with Dr. Salam al-Zubaie, the Deputy Prime Minister, that the factions in Iraq will continue to fight, they will continue to use America as a crutch for as long as they possibly can. We gave them time. We did exactly what we said we would do. And what did they do? They squandered that time. They continued to posture for a better position, and they continue to do that today. Blood is spilling, Iraqi blood, American blood, and they continue to posture. Violence increases, and they continue to posture. They refuse to come together. It is high time for us to allow Iraq to take over, to stand up for itself. They will stand up when we stand down.

The other thing that was very amazing, when you see it, and we talk about how much money we're spending there, we talk about the \$16 million an hour, the \$2 billion a week. And they sound like numbers until you actually go there and you see the amount of equipment and you see the amount of investment we are making there. And obviously that is something that we have been doing and we will continue to do. But when you think about the fights that we have here right on this floor, the debates that we have on this floor about things like SCHIP, about things like improving our infrastructure that's crumbling, about things that are good domestically for our economy, and we don't do them. And we discuss and continue to debate about the money, and yet we spend billions and billions of dollars in Iraq.

I think while we do that, countries like China continue to take money and they invest it in their economy. We need to make our investment in our domestic economy, in our bridges, in our infrastructure, in our economy, in our health care system, in education. Those are the things that the American people want. Those are the things that we ran on last year. Those are the things that we promised the American people. And those are the things that we need to continue to work on.

I thank you thank you very much, my colleagues from the freshman class, for being here today. And, Ms. SUTTON, thank you very much for bringing us here.

Ms. SUTTON. Thank you, Representative ARCURI. That firsthand account and your observations are very enlightening. We appreciate you bringing them forward and, again, highlighting the fact that as we make this choice and as the President opts to try and keep us in Iraq for 10 years, or beyond, it means there are other consequences. Beyond all of those other consequences we talked about militarily and the effects on our military, there are those domestic issues, Representative SHEAPORTER, that you point out and Mr. ARCURI points out that we will continue to fall behind on. I think that the picture is becoming a little bit more clear down here tonight that we need some comprehensive thinking that is smart and effective. And the question

of a responsible redeployment and what that plan should look like is really the one that we need to be working on.

With that, I want to pass it over to another great Member of the new Congress, a freshman from Minnesota who I think is going to shed some light on the Blackwater situation.

Mr. ELLISON. Mr. Speaker, I am really honored to join my members of this freshman class. I am so proud to be a Member of the 110th Congress.

I just wanted to point out that this week as we contemplate and as we've seen the three reports, the GAO report, the report from General Petraeus, the report from General Jones, we are at a point where we have to make a big decision. The people of America and Iraq want our troops to have a safe but clear end point to this conflict. The surge has not been successful, as we see 11 of 18 legislative security and economic benchmarks set down have not been met.

But I just wanted to talk about a very interesting and curious development in this whole conflict, which is that part of the story of the Iraq conflict is the contractors. Blackwater is the most well known of them, but that's not the only one. There's DynCorp, there's Titan, there's Casey, there's many of them. As a matter of fact, what we have seen is a privatization of this conflict. We've seen the privatization of this conflict as literally estimated at upwards of 150,000 contractors have been in Iraq. And the question is, since we've never privatized a war, since we've always kept an essential governmental function, which is defense of the Nation, within the firm hands of the government and we've never really privatized a military conflict before, what does all of this mean? Interestingly and sadly, we've seen this privatization situation devolve into a very dangerous situation which I believe has in many ways compromised national security and has damaged the reputation of the United States and has led, in my view, to a situation where the Iraqi Government, even though it is a government under occupation, under U.S. military occupation, has had to make a statement to throw Blackwater out of its country.

Now, think about that. This is a government that is not in full control of its own country but has mustered itself and said, Look, in order to go forward, this institution, Blackwater, must leave our country. I just want to talk about this a little bit because I think that it's an important part of the story and it needs to be told even from the floor of Congress.

The recent incident that I'm talking about has caused the Iraqi Government to revoke the license of Blackwater. This is the result of a situation, of a killing of Iraqi citizens that happened on September 11, 2007 and the wounding of 14 others by a Blackwater USA security company. Ostensibly, this private security company guards U.S. Embassy

personnel in Iraq. Blackwater USA is based in North Carolina and is one of the largest of at least 28 different private security firms that have received governmental contracts to work in Iraq, paid for by at least \$4 billion in taxpayer dollars.

This group, funded by American taxpayer dollars through their contract, seems to hold very few American values, it seems to me, except for making money, by some accounts as much as five times the amount that our brave soldiers make. Five times the amount the average soldier is making is what one of these contractors can make, particularly one that was in Blackwater. According to one source, in February 2004, Blackwater started training former Chilean commandos, some of whom were serving during the Pinochet years in Chile, for duty in Iraq. People who know the Pinochet regime know that this regime was known for people disappearing in the country. Torture was routine. Other news reports indicate that four of the guards killed in January while working for a subcontractor had served in South Africa's security forces during the apartheid era, and one of them had applied for amnesty for crimes that he committed while operating under the apartheid regime. Not good news.

Press reports further indicate that this latest incident was not isolated, with Iraqi Interior Minister spokesman Abdul-Karim Khalaf calling the episode the "last and biggest mistake" committed by Blackwater.

Khalaf went on to say, "Security contracts do not allow them to shoot people randomly. They are here to protect personnel, not to shoot people without reason."

Mr. Speaker, we are not in a position to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people if we have cowboy mercenary vigilantes. Blackwater seems to be accountable neither to the Iraqi Government, and there are serious questions as to whether they're even accountable to the U.S. Government. They are not subject to the Geneva Convention, which our soldiers are. If accounts of this and other incidents prove to be accurate, and of course due process is critically important, then the Iraqi Government's actions to expel Blackwater from Iraq could indicate the first concrete sign that a real government may exist in Baghdad. Who knows. We'll see.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is very critical that we continue to look into this issue of private contractors. It is an important part of the story of Iraq. It is a critical and fundamental part of this dialogue that we're having. We can't privatize our Nation's national defense. When we do, we lose control of these people.

Mercenary actions are not deemed sanctioned by U.N. charter. And to hire a private mercenary army is something that we should not be associated with. They call themselves security contractors, and yet they have been involved

in major military actions in Najaf. Everybody remembers the horrific incident that occurred in Fallujah that was succeeded by a major action against that city. At this point I think it's important for us to pay much closer attention to this situation and put some real accountability on this situation.

I yield back at this time, but I do ask that we raise these important issues and focus on exactly what this means for our country and our national security.

Ms. SUTTON. I thank Representative ELLISON for that addition to this debate this evening. It's important that all of this be exposed to the light of day so that we can make the inquiries that are appropriate as well as the policies that make sense from this Chamber.

At this point, I would like to throw it back over to Representative CAROL SHEA-PORTER from New Hampshire. I think, Representative SHEA-PORTER, you were going to share with us some statistics and information from a report.

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. Thank you, Congresswoman.

I am holding in my hands a report to Congress from September 6, 2007 called "The Independent Commission Security Forces of Iraq." This is retired General Jones. They did an absolutely wonderful job, nonpartisan, and I'm very pleased to say that it seems incredibly accurate and fair in all respects.

Here is a concern, or one of the many concerns that I have, and I just want to read a couple of lines and talk about it. It says, Iraq's central government in Baghdad, and this is page 39, does not have national reach in terms of security, nor does it have a monopoly on use of force, a defining characteristic of a functioning nation state. Militias continue to play a prominent role and are seen by American and Iraqi officials alike as posing almost as significant a threat to Iraqi stability and security as al Qaeda in Iraq.

Now, isn't that fascinating? We hear them talk about al Qaeda, al Qaeda, al Qaeda in Iraq. Al Qaeda was not in Iraq on 9/11, 2001, and yet we have militias roaming around and there is very little talk about that.

Now, as this report states, if you have militias, it means that the Iraqi Central Government is not in control of their streets. This is where we have our soldiers, in the middle of a civil war. And this is the reason that we've had ethnic cleansing and the other problems that we're having.

I want to talk about the Iraqi political establishment for a moment. Our troops have done everything they've been asked to do. They are guarding the streets. And yes, violence has gone down where our troops are, and it's a great credit to our troops, but I can tell you right now that if you put 50 policemen and women on a corner of any major city in America, or anywhere,

crime would go down because these forces do a terrific job, but it doesn't mean that you've changed the hearts and minds of the people, the criminals. What we have here is an Iraqi Government that has not stepped forward. And so we are relying on our troops to not only control the violence in Baghdad, but also to run everything.

The Iraqi Government, the Parliament, wanted to take 2 months off this summer in the middle of this crisis. When the White House, Tony Snow, was asked about the 2-month vacation, he said, well, it's 140 degrees there. And somebody said, well, aren't our troops in 140 degrees as well?

The Iraqi Parliament also, more than half of them, signed a petition asking the United States to leave Iraq. Now, this is not leadership. Our troops have waited for years for Iraqi leadership to step forward and run their country.

□ 1715

We cannot ask our troops to not only be the police there, be the cop on the beat there, but also to be the politicians there. If the Iraqi Government will not, cannot, step up, we have to finally say we have to step down. It has been just too long.

So picture that, what it is like, and you will understand why 100,000 Iraqis have been leaving every month and why there is more than 2 million people who are now out of the Iraqi borders. They have lost their middle class. They have lost anybody who could help the society. They have fled. And you understand why, when you think about militias and you think about the lack of Iraqi political leadership. You didn't hear very much about that coming out of the White House. Ask them to name the Iraqi politicians, the leaders, who are going to take over, and ask when. Because they can't say when. They can't name who is going to take over. We cannot leave our troops there indefinitely until the Iraqis decide to find political reconciliation.

That is the problem. As long as we have our troops there, yes, we can tamp down the violence where our troops are. But we must have a government. That report shows that they have militia wandering around and that the Iraqi Government has not stepped up to the task. We are in our fifth year, Americans know that, our fifth year of our treasure and our blood of our people. It is time to stop.

Ms. SUTTON. Well, I thank the gentlewoman from New Hampshire. It is a sad state of affairs, but it goes back to the point that we have heard here tonight, and that is that unity in Iraq, really, at the end of the day, is going to be determined by the people of Iraq. We all know that our military has performed valiantly and selflessly and that they are true American heroes. But as you point out, it is not fair to keep them trapped in the middle of a civil war and refuse to acknowledge that all that has been discussed here tonight is going on. That is not a pru-

dent plan. I think it is time. We have heard the call when we go home and talk to our constituents. It is time for a plan to responsibly redeploy. That is what the American people need from our President.

I will share just a few statistics with you that sort of buttress this need. We know that there was a great rollout when we had this so-called surge introduced as a new way forward. But let me just shed some light on some of the results. In June, July and August of 2007, it marked the bloodiest summer so far U.S. troops in Iraq have had, with 264 soldiers killed. U.S. casualties in Iraq are 56 percent higher this year than they were at this time in 2006. Since January of this year, we have lost 761 brave servicemen and women to the war in Iraq.

By the way, I should say that these statistics are as of September 10. I have fear they have grown since then. As of September 10, 3,759 U.S. troops have been killed and more than 27,770 have been wounded in Iraq since it began in March 2003. Think about that. Think about the cost in lives. Think about the cost in the casualties and the injuries that our soldiers are facing for the rest of their lives in many cases, the costs to them, which is unfathomable and enormous, and the cost to the American people as we do what we must do, and that is provide them with the health care and the resources they need and to fulfill the promise that we make to them when we send them into harm's way. We must take care of our veterans.

We also learn that, and you pointed this out, Representative SHEA-PORTER, that in Iraq, opinions are also that they would like our troops to be responsibly deploying. Just to share some information from a new poll that was jointly conducted and released by ABC News, BBC News and Japan's NHK, 47 percent of Iraqis want American forces and their coalition allies to leave the country immediately. That is a 12 percent increase over March. Remember, our soldiers are there in that environment. The polls showed that every person interviewed in Baghdad and Anbar province, a Sunni-dominated area where Bush recently visited and cited progress, said the troop increase has worsened security. Seventy percent believe security has deteriorated in the areas where the U.S. surge troops were located. Between 67 and 70 percent say that the surge has hampered conditions for political dialogue, reconstruction and economic development. Fifty-seven percent of Iraqis say that attacking coalition forces is "acceptable," more than three times higher than when polled in February of 2004. That is the environment we are keeping our troops in. The President's plan is to do so for the very foreseeable future.

It is time for a plan of responsible redeployment. Our military should not be asked to try to control a civil war, a sectarian civil war. We have heard all

the components of all the factions and all the dynamics that are going on in Iraq. Just think about our troops sitting in the middle of that and doing everything they are asked to do. We know from the report that Representative SHEA-PORTER referenced, and we know from the GAO reports. They confirm that our strategy is not working and that this conflict begs for a political solution, not a military one; though the United States can play a constructive role, and we will, and we have done so by providing, through high cost and blood and money, an opportunity to embrace a different way to the Iraqi people. We also know the toll that that country has, along the way, encountered.

Seventy-eight percent of Americans say they believe that the U.S. should withdraw some or all troops from Iraq. Sixty percent of Americans say the U.S. should set a timetable to withdraw our forces from Iraq and should "stick to that timetable regardless of what is going on in Iraq." That is not because we don't care. That is because we are looking at the evidence, and we are trying to make the responsible decision for our troops, for the safety of this country and for domestic policy.

At this point, I would like to turn it over to Representative SHEA-PORTER, and we will be wrapping up here in a few moments.

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. I would also like to point out that this really is a national security issue for the United States of America. General Peter Pace was asked if he was comfortable with the ability of our Nation to respond to an emerging world threat. He paused and he said, "No, I am not comfortable."

We have our troops bogged down in Iraq. We do have enemies around the world, no question about it, but our military is strained. We know that the troops could not stay at this pace past March anyway, so it is natural that the President would call to bring back some of the troops in March. It is not really progress. It is just acknowledging that we have to have them back. But here is the issue: If you know there is a burglar in your neighborhood, the first thing you do is you lock your own door. We didn't do that. We went to Iraq instead of locking our own door. We didn't even pass the 9/11 recommendations. The 110th Congress had to take care of that business. So, finally, we are going to be inspecting cargo from airplanes, and we are going to be inspecting cargo that comes from overseas, and we are going to inspect 100 percent of it after a period of time. That should have been done immediately. We should have beefed up homeland security, locked our doors, so to speak, and then worked with other nations to catch terrorists. They were ready.

On 9/12/01, we had the world's sympathy and empathy. They were ready to work with us to catch these horrible terrorists. Instead, we went to Iraq,

and now our brave troops are bogged down there. The Iraqis have suffered enough. It is time to bring them home responsibly and to start looking at building up our troop strength again so that we can respond to anyplace around the world that we might need to be.

Ms. SUTTON. Well said, Representative SHEA-PORTER.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to close and yield back the balance of our time.

REPUBLICAN FRESHMEN THIRD QUARTERLY REPORT TO THE 110TH CONGRESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from California (Mr. MCCARTHY) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. MCCARTHY of California. Mr. Speaker, tonight we are having our third quarterly report to the 110th Congress. This is a quarterly report for the newly elected republican freshmen. We came here to solve problems. We came here to find partnerships. We came here to really, what we listened about during the campaign, to make America better. Tonight, I have a few freshmen joining with me.

The idea tonight is about accountability. What has gone on here in Congress? I think every time we do this quarterly report, I go and I check the Web sites. Again, today is a new record. Congress has the lowest approval rating, at 11 percent, that it has in the history of its taking a poll; lower than in the years of Watergate, lower than during the years when we were rationing and being held hostage in Iran, lower than the time of 1994 when the last time the parties switched powers here. Tonight is the night we talk about what has gone on, the accountability of what has happened here, and what has taken place.

To start us out tonight is a congresswoman from Minnesota, from St. Cloud, MICHELE BACHMANN. I yield to Mrs. BACHMANN.

Mrs. BACHMANN. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the great State of California, Congressman MCCARTHY. What a wonderful leadership role he is playing with our freshmen class.

It is true, Mr. Speaker, we are so grateful, as freshmen Members, to be here with new ideas and a new perspective. Part of that perspective is a positive outlook on life and a positive outlook on our country. One thing about Americans, Mr. Speaker, is we tend to be happy people, go-getter people, people that have ideas, innovation. We are entrepreneurs. We always look over the next hill. We always look for the next goal. We are forward-looking people.

One thing that I have been a little dismayed about in my time here in the Congress is I have heard so much negativity on the floor. As a matter of fact, in the previous Special Order, I was

amazed at the level of negativity that I heard. That is not representative of the American people. It certainly is not representative of the people of the Sixth District of the State of Minnesota. They are positive people that are looking, as we Republican freshmen are looking, at new ideas, at fresh perspectives.

I was so intrigued this weekend when I was home in my district, I had the chance to read the Sunday paper. I found an article in that paper that talked about the incredible progress we have made in recent years. So much of that has to do, Mr. Speaker, with a lot of the very good decisions that were made in the previous Congresses, particularly, Mr. Speaker, the tax cuts that were passed in 2001, 2003. I say that because I am a Federal tax litigation attorney. I hate high taxation. If you speak with most Americans, they also detest high levels of taxation. One thing that the Congress did so well was to reduce that level in 2001 and in 2003. The one thing we don't want to see happen is to have the country take a dramatic turn now under the Democrat controlled House of Representatives and embrace tax increases. This really concerns us because what we have seen so far is the Democrats are now embracing what, you know, the argument is, will it be the largest or the second largest tax increase in American history? Whatever, it is a very large tax increase. But what the other formula for success has brought about, Mr. Speaker, is prosperity.

□ 1730

Prosperity not just for those who are the high income earners, not even just the middle income earners. We have seen tremendous levels of prosperity, even for those who we would consider the poor among us, who government considers the poor among us, and if there is anyone who deserves help up, a hand up, it is the poorest among us.

In this article I read this weekend, it is really a scorecard of sorts on the Republicans and the great tax cuts that they put through this Congress, and it is very good news.

If you dig into the numbers, as this author writes, his name is Jason Lewis, he is a writer from the Twin Cities, and I want to quote from this article, he writes, "We now have a record number of Americans with health insurance."

I will tell you what. You would never know that, listening to people speak on the floor of this House. You would think everyone is destitute and no one has health insurance. We are at an all-time high in this country with the number of people that have health insurance.

The doom-and-gloom focus says that most of those people who do not have health insurance currently live in households with incomes that are in excess of \$50,000 a year. So even the people who don't have health insurance in the United States are making over \$50,000 a year. In fact, many of them